

Ethnicity Disparities in Job Control in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

Despite widely-reported ethnicity disparities in pay and occupational attainment, little is known about how different ethnic groups fare in job control—a crucial component of job quality with significant implications for wellbeing and health. Drawing on two large-scale representative datasets in the United Kingdom (1992 to 2022), we find that workers from all Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups report significantly lower job control than their White British counterparts, although considerable heterogeneity exists depending on the BAME group in question. Ethnicity penalties are also most pronounced for foreign-born workers. Despite a slow trend towards convergence, ethnicity disparities have remained significant over the last three decades. We further show that disparities are largely unexplained by compositional factors such as pay and occupation, demonstrating ethnicity penalties in job control. By linking ethnicity to job control, this study contributes to the growing research on BAME workers in the labour market, as well as the literatures on job quality and multi-segmented labour markets.

Key words

Ethnicity; job control; job quality; United Kingdom.

Introduction

The poorer average labour market prospects of certain Black, Asian, and Minority ethnic (BAME) groups compared to their White or White British counterparts in the United Kingdom (UK) is well-documented. These poorer prospects commonly take the form of lower pay and higher chances of non-permanent employment (Brynin and Güveli 2012; Brynin et al. 2019; Evans 2019), and seemingly stem from a constellation of structural barriers faced by certain ethnic groups, ranging from the shadow of poorer early life conditions and educational experiences (Sewell 2021) to hiring discrimination (Heath and Di Stasio 2019), as well as socio-cultural issues related to assimilation and marginalization (McGregor-Smith 2017). In recent years, these inequalities have garnered increasing attention by policy makers, with the UK government conducting several reviews (e.g., Sewell 2021), and in relation to specifically work, encouraging (though not mandating) ethnicity pay gap reporting by organisations (Race Disparity Unit et al. 2023).

Alongside wider recognition of ethnicity-based disparities in the labour market, there has been a trend towards greater acceptance that job quality in the UK and in other nations in addition to pay, security and fair treatment, also incorporates the nature of job tasks and work organisation. This is encapsulated in various national and regional job quality frameworks such as ‘Good Work’ and ‘Fair Work’ in the United Kingdom and supra-national frameworks developed by Eurofound and the OECD internationally. These frameworks overlap a great deal and all agree that more intrinsic features of work related to job design are core aspects of job quality—including job control—defined as the extent to which workers can decide what tasks they do and how they do them (Karasek 1979: 238). Job control is central to models of direct participation and related literatures. For instance, within the employment relations and HRM literatures, job control is seen as a component of high involvement management (Wood and de Menezes 2011). In seminal industrial sociology contributions, it is seen as a critical antecedent

to alienation (Blauner 1964; Kohn 1976); within the organisation psychology literature as central to models of job stress (Karasek and Theorell 1990), positive job attitudes, and behaviours (Hackman and Oldham 1980). Within the public health literature, job control has been shown to be a predictor of morbidity and mortality (Marmot et al. 1991).

In this paper, we connect ethnicity inequalities and (intrinsic) job quality, two lines of investigation that have largely been separate. On the one hand, to our knowledge, scarce evidence exists on the extent of ethnicity disparities in the underlying intrinsic conditions of jobs that strongly predict wellbeing such as job control, which as mentioned, is now routinely included in job quality policy definitions both in the UK and internationally. On the other hand, job quality research has primarily focused on disparities on other protected characteristics such as sex (e.g., Warren and Lyonette 2018; Stier and Yaish 2014) and important non-protected characteristics such as region of residence (e.g., IFOW 2021) and occupational characteristics (e.g., Koumenta and Williams 2020). However, it has ignored the increasing population diversity and implicitly assumes that job quality patterns found in the ethnic majority population group can be applied to ethnic minority groups (c.f. Zwysen and Demireva 2018). The failure to integrate both streams of research not only precludes a comprehensive understanding of contemporary labour market inequalities, but also may lead to misleading conclusions or policy suggestions.

To begin to fill this gap, this article aims to provide first large-scale empirical analysis of how ethnicity relates to the degree of job control in the UK. Drawing on the Understanding Society Survey (USS) supplemented with the Skills and Employment Survey (SES), we examine how different ethnic groups fare in job control compared with the White ethnic majority. A key strength of our study is that it provides a granular analysis of job control for detailed ethnic minority groups. This is driven by the fact that in the UK context, there is considerable heterogeneity in occupational profiles but also in the wider socio-economic characteristics

within the broad ‘BAME’ group. For example, it has been widely reported that in the Indian and Chinese minorities are more likely to occupy managerial and professional jobs relative to the White British majority, whereas Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Black African/Caribbean minorities are more likely to occupy routine and manual jobs (Evans 2019). Finally, we examine the extent to which differences in job control (if any) can be attributed to these (compositional differences) or to other unobserved factors (ethnic penalties), which may include differential treatment by employers and managers for a given set of observable characteristics.

By addressing these themes, this study contributes to the wider literature on job quality, while by incorporating disaggregated indicators of ethnicity, it facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of ethnicity-based labour market inequalities. The paper further contributes to debates on labour market stratification, and in particular to theoretical approaches that depart from the strict dual labour market framework (c.f. Doeringer and Piore 1971) and instead allude to the idea that labour markets are multi-segmented (Kesici 2022; Grimshaw et al. 2017; Rubery 2007).

In brief, we find large and persistent ethnicity penalties in job control for BAME groups in both datasets and that despite a slow trend towards convergence, ethnicity disparities have remained significant over the last three decades. A substantial portion remains when job/workplace and demographic factors are considered, with the extent degree depending on the specific ethnic group. These patterns of general disadvantage relative to White British holds among a variety of subgroups, although they are most pronounced for foreign-born. We close by outlining the research and policy implications of our findings.

Job Control and Ethnicity

The field of job quality is an amalgam of approaches from economics (highlighting extrinsic aspects such as pay and benefits), sociology of work (highlighting skill development and job security) and organizational psychology (highlighting intrinsic aspects such as autonomy and job demands) (e.g., Gallie 2007; Green et al. 2013). The focus of this paper is on the particular intrinsic job quality dimension of job control (sometimes referred to as autonomy, task discretion, influence, or decision latitude), which refers to the extent to which a worker can decide what tasks they do in their job and how they do them (Karasek 1979: 289). Job control is often considered a form of direct participation (e.g., Gallie et al. 2017) distinct from other forms of voice which are often more to do with influence over department, workplace, and organisational decision-making rather than at the task or job-level. Job control is often also further differentiated from schedule control and work location control (Wheatley 2017).

Job control—defined in this way—is an important component in modern job quality policy frameworks and high involvement management (Wood and de Menezes 2011). For instance, in models of decentralised decision-making, job control is supposed to elicit commitment (Walton 1985). Job control has a much longer history within industrial sociology as a critical antecedent to alienation (Blauner 1964; Kohn 1976). Job control also features prominently in more recent debates about ‘meaningful work’ (see for example Veltman 2016; Yeoman et al., 2019). For example, drawing on critical labour process and humanistic approaches to job design, Laaser and Karlsson (2022) develop a typology of meaningful work where the autonomy to exercise skill and judgement over the methods and sequencing of work is one of its three pillars. Within organisational psychology, job control is central to models of job stress, where it is the critical moderator of the relationship between job demands and job stress (Karasek and Theorell 1990). In Hackman and Oldham’s (1980) job characteristics model, job control is considered a core characteristic—along with skill variety, task significance, task identity, and feedback—in determining intrinsic motivation and other job attitudes and

behaviours. Indeed, research has shown workers who have more control over what work they do and how they do it report higher levels of affective wellbeing (Gallie et al 2017), job satisfaction (Wheatley 2017), and eudemonic wellbeing and purpose (Williams et al. 2022), . Within the public health literature, job control—purportedly through its psychological effects—is known to affect physical health, and so jobs with particularly low control are associated with higher morbidity and mortality relative to jobs with high job control, even when adjusting for important confounders (Marmot et al. 1991).

However, scarce research has studied ethnicity disparities in job control. The main focus of the research to date on ethnicity disparities in the labour market to date has been on differential unemployment chances (Li and Heath 2020), and for those in employment, differences in extrinsic aspects of job quality such as pay and insecurity (Brynin and Güveli 2012; Bank of England 2020; Evans 2019; Forth et al. 2022). As well as generally poorer pay, BAME groups also tend to be more likely to have insecure contracts and work arrangements. For instance, Felstead et al. (2020: 42) found BAME workers were twice as likely as White British to have zero-hours contracts and working at short notice, while Heyes et al (2018: 425) found BAME workers were more likely to be in casual work. In terms of employment status, it has been documented for some time that BAME workers are more likely to be self-employed (Brynin et al. 2019). This research finds that it is likely through barriers to permanent and stable employment rather than a particular preference for greater job control.

When it comes to more intrinsic aspects of job quality, the research has been less extensive with respect to ethnicity disparities. Given that job control is correlated with pay, contractual status, and other aspects of job quality (Heyes et al. 2018), and we know a great deal about the general disadvantaged position of most BAME ethnic groups in the labour market, particularly in terms of pay and occupational attainment, it is plausible that similar patterns exist in job control. We also note, however, that the correlation between different job quality domains is

not perfect. For instance, research finds there are occupations that have a good degree of job control but are relatively low-paid e.g., beauticians, playgroup leaders, and bakers, while there are also high-paid occupations with relatively low job control e.g., airline pilots, accountants, and solicitors (Williams et al. 2020). Thus, we cannot reliably make inferences from one aspect of job quality to others, so we approach this as an empirical question.

Heterogeneity and Multi-Segmented Labour Markets

The commonly-adopted two-factor view of ethnicity in the UK ('BAME' vs. white), however, masks variation between specific ethnic groups. For instance, in the case of extrinsic aspects of job quality like pay, Indian and Chinese minorities tend to out-earn the White British majority. It also masks the particularly stark pay disadvantage experienced by Pakistani and Bangladeshi minorities. Black Caribbean, African minorities, and mixed ethnicities although also tending to earn less than White British, but have less severe pay penalties (Evans 2019). As the somewhat controversial *Sewell Review* (2021) pointed out, some ethnic groups are seemingly not disadvantaged in the labour market when it comes to some extrinsic aspects of work such as employment, pay, and occupational class, namely Indian and Chinese minorities (at least on an unadjusted basis). Similarly, not all disadvantaged ethnicities are disadvantaged to the same extent—Pakistani and Bangladeshi minorities tend to be more disadvantaged than other groups.

Another key finding in pay gaps research is that country-of-birth also matters. Pay gaps with White British are much smaller or nonsignificant for UK-born BAME workers, at least before confounders such as qualifications are controlled (Bank of England 2020; Zwysen and Demireva 2018). Pay gaps, then, mostly stem from foreign-born BAME workers, and the majority of BAME workers are born overseas. Foreign-born penalties may arise from previous experience and qualifications being undervalued, and from interrupted career trajectories from

moving countries, in particular, lacking work experience specific to the local context (Koumenta et al. 2022). Overall, existing research on extrinsic aspects of job quality points to significant heterogeneity within the ethnic minority categories.

To understand these variations and set a framework as to how they might apply to job control, we draw on the multi-segmented labour market framework. In line with the standard labour market segmentation models, our starting point is that labour markets are divided into the primary and secondary sectors of employment conditions, with the former comprising of ‘good’ and the latter of ‘bad’ jobs (Doeringer and Piore 1971; Rubery 2007). This distinction applies to both extrinsic and intrinsic aspects of job quality such that the secondary sector offers inferior jobs in terms of pay and working conditions, as well as opportunities for training and advancement, discretion, and autonomy. We augment this *dual* labour market segmentation model to account for possible heterogeneity within different ethnic minority groups, but also potentially, to different aspects of job quality too—as outlined above how job control and pay, for instance, do not necessarily always coincide. In particular, we propose a multi-segmentation approach suggesting that the labour market is divided into multiple layers that are characterised by different degrees of job quality, which may themselves depend on the specific aspect of job quality under consideration. Instead of treating different ethnicities as a homogeneous group, this framework is better equipped in accounting for any variations in the labour market experiences of different ethnic groups across different indicators of job quality. Our approach is informed by the observed heterogeneity in how ethnic groups fare in terms of some extrinsic aspects of job quality outlined above, but also research on within-ethnicity disparities in labour market experiences. Kesici (2022) for example, drawing on a sample of Kurds, Turks and Turkish Cypriots workers finds that the former ethnic group—in comparison to the other two ethnic groups—is relegated to the lower layers of the labour market in a shared ethnic economy. In short, to the extent that the empirically observed disadvantage of ethnic groups- compared

to their White counterparts in extrinsic aspects of job quality found within the existing literature also holds for job control, it is also possible that within-group disparities exist since different ethnicities are not homogeneously allocated to jobs, occupations, and industries.

The importance of heterogeneity is also evident when considering the mechanisms that can potentially explain any observed ethnicity disparities in job control. These can be broadly categorised into characteristics of jobs/workplaces and characteristics of individuals on the one hand, and unobserved factors such as differential treatment by employers/managers and differential worker preferences for features of work on the other. They are, however, likely countervailing and so careful empirical instigation is required to understand them. Regarding jobs/workplaces, there are well-known differences in occupational attainment between ethnicities (Evans 2019; Zwysen and Demireva 2018). For instance, with the exception of Indian and Chinese minorities, all other BAME groups are less likely than White British to work in managerial and professional occupations (Evans 2019), occupations known to have higher levels of job control. Segregation may also occur in other ways correlated with job control such as in terms of employment status. BAME workers have a higher-propensity for self-employment (Brynin et al. 2019), which is in turn associated with much higher job control than for employee jobs. BAME workers also have longer gaps outside of the labour market (Li and Heath 2020), and so plausibly may progress to senior roles—jobs with a greater degree of control—at slower rates, even within occupations. On the other hand, BAME workers tend to have higher levels of qualifications, although it must be noted that this does not always translate to occupational attainment or earnings as well as it does for the White British majority (Bank of England 2020; Sewell 2021), but it may translate into better job quality in other areas e.g., through greater job control for a given level of pay.

A final set of explanations concerns unobserved (by surveys) factors such as differential treatment by employers and managers. This is well-documented in the statistical discrimination

literature whereby differential treatment is attributed to ethnicity being used as proxy for productivity relevant characteristics that are otherwise hard to observe (Phelps 1972). Research in the UK, for example, shows direct discrimination in recruitment according to ethnicity. Valentina DiStasio and colleagues' have conducted a series of audit studies whereby fictitious CVs are sent out to employers for a variety of job roles and levels, varying the signal of the 'applicants' ethnic background primarily through name and place of birth. These studies show that BAME jobseekers would need to submit 60 per cent more applications to receive the same number of call-backs as an equivalently-qualified White candidate (Heath and DiStasio 2019a). What is more, the lower call back rates of some BAME groups has not improved since the 1960s (Heath and DiStasio 2019b). This differential treatment according to name and country-of-origin may extend to other areas of work such as how work is organised once hired.

In addition to differential treatment, another mechanism accounting for possible penalties is that different BAME groups tend to have more extrinsic and less intrinsic work orientations than White British (Wang and Morav 2021a), which may feed through to job choice and so job control, for instance, by trading off job control for higher pay or security.

Methods

Data

Two datasets are used in this paper: the Understanding Society Survey (USS) (University of Essex et al. 2020) supplemented with the Skills and Employment Survey (SES) (Felstead et al. 2019a). Both used clustered stratified sampling design to ensure the representativeness of their samples and asked respondents questions on ethnicity and job control, as well as a rich set of control variables. We present findings from a combination of these datasets because both have advantages which compensate for limitations in the other. The main advantage of the SES is that it is long-running, fielding job control questions since 1992, allowing us to chart longer-

term trends (the USS did not field job control questions until 2010). The main advantage of the USS is that it has much larger sample sizes, including a booster sample for underrepresented ethnic groups, allowing for a more detailed analysis. The small sample sizes of the SES only affords a simplistic two-factor ‘BAME’ grouping. It also did not ask country-of-birth found to be a significant consideration in ethnicity pay gaps research (Bank of England 2020; Evans 2019) as well being a component to the protected characteristic of ethnicity in the Equality Act 2010. Thus, the USS will be our main focus.

Defining ethnicity

Ethnicity as an identity characteristic is complex and no approach can satisfactorily capture it. We follow the ONS’ approach, which is based on many years of research and consultation. This is widely-used across government and government surveys and registers (e.g., the Census). In this model, ethnicity has an analytically ‘hierarchical’ structure, with detailed ethnic groups (‘response categories’) nested within aggregate groups (‘main-level category’). There is no standardisation in how detailed categories are meaningfully aggregated for analysis, however. For instance, even within ONS publications, a review found 21 different aggregations were used (Race Disparity Unit n.d.). To a certain extent, such decisions are guided by the research purpose and sample sizes. In this paper, we are interested in both high-level and detailed analysis insofar as sample sizes permit, so we present results using a ten-category definition of ethnicity in the USS where samples are large and a two-category definition in the SES where sample sizes are small. Table 1 outlines the categories used in this paper and how they relate to response categories.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Defining job control

The USS included the following four items on job control biennially, beginning in the second wave (2010-12) up to the latest available wave (2020-22): ‘In general, how much influence do you have over the following in your current job over...’ ‘...what tasks you do in your job?’, ‘...the pace at which you work?’, ‘how you do your work?’, and ‘...the order in which you carry out tasks?’. The response categories ranged from 1 to 4: ‘a lot’, ‘some’, ‘a little’, and ‘none’. We reverse-coded responses and then averaged them to form a job control index (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.864). The SES included the following four items on job control in the since the 1992 surveys (i.e., 1992, 1997, 2001, 2006, 2012, and 2017): ‘How much influence do you personally have on...’ ‘how hard you work?’, ‘deciding what tasks you are to do?’, ‘deciding how you are to do the task?’, ‘deciding the quality standards to which you work?’, The response categories ranged from 1 to 4: ‘a great deal’, ‘a fair amount’, ‘not much’, and ‘none at all’. As with the USS, responses to these items were reverse-coded and then averaged to form a job control index (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.782).

Analytical strategy

The analysis proceeds in two main steps. We first present a descriptive overview—establishing for the first-time ethnicity-based patterns of job control in the UK from two nationally-representative datasets, and how trends have evolved over the last three decades. Second, we move onto multivariable linear regression analysis (OLS) with the USS focusing on the ten-category ethnicity classification. The purpose here is to establish the extent to which the patterns revealed in the first step might be accounted for by differing profiles between ethnic groups in observable factors. To facilitate this, we estimate a straightforward decomposition between an unadjusted or unconditional model with no controls and an adjusted or conditional model which includes an extensive set of controls. The difference or change in the coefficients of each ethnicity category between the two models indicates the extent to which the control variables account for ethnicity disparities and the remainder is due to unobserved factors. The

control variables can be divided into three main groups.¹ First, demographics (age, sex, marital status, whether has children, parental social class (NS-SEC), whether has degree qualifications or above, and region of residence). Second, job and workplace factors (hours, job tenure, whether temporary contract, occupational class (NS-SEC), industrial sector, and pay). Finally, we also include wave dummies, which adjust for when the survey was taken and included in all models to account for general trends in job control. We perform the analysis on the pooled sample as a whole and also separately by whether UK-born or foreign-born. Because of the panel structure of the USS, we cluster standard errors (and confidence intervals) on the respondent. In all analyses, we apply survey weights to account for unequal selection probabilities into the samples and differential nonresponse. Full variable list and descriptive statistics can be found in the Online Appendix Table A1.

Results

Descriptive overview

We begin by charting historical patterns in job control in the SES 1992 to 2017 using the simplistic two-factor ethnicity classification. Table 2 shows overall job control for both White and BAME workers declined over this period. The general decline in job control in the UK has been reported elsewhere (e.g., Davies and Felstead 2023). Importantly, BAME workers have lower overall job control than White workers, on average, in all years. These differentials

¹ We note that some of the controls we introduce in our models are aspects that are likely to confound the relationship between autonomy and ethnicity (e.g. age), while others may be due to the experience of discrimination outside of the workplace (e.g. education and occupation). However, one aspect of occupation, managerial responsibilities or status, could also be an aspect of discrimination within the workplace if discrimination means that ethnic minorities are less likely to be promoted in managerial positions, so by including managerial status as a control we may be underestimating the autonomy penalty faced by ethnic minority workers. We would like to thank an anonymous referee for this comment.

remained broadly stable over the 25-year period and are similar whether one considers the fraction selecting ‘a lot’ on all four job control indicators instead of the averaged index (Table 2), and whether one considers averages for each of the four job control subcomponents separately (Figure 1).

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Turning to the USS, which covers the period 2010-12 to 2020-22 and measures job control differently to the SES but can be seen as extending the SES findings to more recent times, BAME workers are found to have lower overall job control, on average, than White workers too (Table 3). While differentials are broadly stable across these years, there appears to be some convergence in the three most recent waves; a time period that the SES does not extend to. The patterns in the USS are broadly replicated whether one considers the fraction selecting ‘a great deal’ on all four job control indicators instead of the averaged index (Table 3) and whether one considers averages for each of the four job control components separately (Figure 2).

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Just how big are these differentials? These differentials can be put into context by comparing them to differentials in job control in other meaningful categories. Table 4 compares the White/BAME job control differential to other job control differentials in the pooled USS surveys. The gap is roughly equivalent to the differentials in job control between prime age workers and young workers, between the sexes, between large workplaces (500+ employees) and small workplaces (<10 employees), and larger than the gap between graduates and non-graduates. Previous research tends to find the factor with the single largest conditional effect on job control is occupational class (Gallie 2015). The figures in Table 4 suggest that the gap

in job control between White and BAME workers is almost one-third of the magnitude between those in managerial and professional occupations (e.g., medical practitioners and software professionals) and those in routine and manual occupations (e.g., sales assistants and van drivers). In short, therefore, we conclude that the magnitude of the ethnicity gaps uncovered here are clearly of substantive importance.

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Detailed ethnicity categories analysis

The analysis thus far has focused on the simplistic two-factor conceptualisation of ethnicity. To explore how gaps vary across more detailed categories, the rest of the paper focuses on the pooled USS which has sufficient sample sizes to do this. Figure 3 documents the differentials between ethnic groups with White British (combined UK born and foreign-born) as the reference category (dashed vertical lines in the figure) for all workers (Panel A), for UK-born workers (Panel B), and for foreign-born workers (Panel C). Note that the reference group is the same in all three panels (White British born in any country).

[FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

As expected, there is some heterogeneity across ethnic groups that the simplistic two-factor classification masks. Nonetheless, the general pattern in Panel A is one of lower average job control for non-White British groups, with six of the nine groups having lower average job control that is statistically significant (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean, Black African, and the miscellaneous ethnicity category). White Other, mixed ethnicity, and Chinese minorities each have statistically indistinguishable average job control to the White British majority. Differentials are particularly large for Black Caribbean and Black African minorities, where the differentials are comparable to those between full- and part-time work (Table 4).

These findings are in contrast to the ethnicity pay gap literature where, when exploring detailed ethnicity categories, Indian and Chinese minorities tend to out-earn White or White British workers on an unadjusted basis (Bank of England 2020; Evans 2019). In the case of job control, Indian workers actually have lower job control than White British workers, whereas Chinese workers have similar levels. This underscores the point made earlier that inferences about how disparities in other, particularly intrinsic, aspects of job quality such as job control cannot simply be read of from what is known about pay differentials; though correlated, pay and job control do not necessarily coincide, and why a multi-segmented approach suits our focus.

Multivariable decomposition analysis

As in the ethnicity pay gap literature, there are a variety of reasons why the unadjusted patterns might be as they are. Next, we explore the extent to which these differentials might be accounted for by differences in observed characteristics, namely job/workplace and demographic characteristics. Examining the raw and adjusted job control differentials for all workers in Table 5, the extent to which observed factors can account for the differentials with White British depends on the group in question.

In general, groups with the largest unadjusted differentials see proportionately larger reductions towards parity in their adjusted differentials. In particular, about two-fifths of the Black Caribbean differential can be accounted for, and about one-third in the case of Black African, and one-fifth in the case of Bangladeshi. Differential occupational and industrial profiles (occupational segregation) are important in understanding differentials in these specific cases (see Table A1 in the Online Appendix). Bangladeshi workers are overrepresented in routine and manual occupations, while Black Caribbean and Black African workers are overrepresented in health and the public sector—occupations and sectors known with job

control (Gallie 2015) However, it must be stressed that the majority of these specific differentials *cannot* be accounted for by job/workplace and demographic factors.

In the case of White Other, Indian, Pakistani, and Chinese, their differentials actually *increase* away from parity once other factors are taken into account. In the case of Indian and Chinese, their adjusted lower job control is offset by their higher occupational classes and qualifications than White British (see Table A1), and in the case of Chinese, more than offset so that it becomes statistically indistinguishable from zero on an unadjusted basis.

On an adjusted or ‘like-for-like’ basis, job control differentials for all BAME groups compared to White British are relatively similar. Thus, even Indian and Chinese are disadvantaged groups when it comes to job control, also suffering a penalty. Overall, though, these results imply ethnicity gaps in job control partly operate through factors correlated with ethnicity. This is not to say that ethnicity is not important, even in a narrow statistical sense. First, the vast majority of the share of differentials for all ethnic groups is not through observable factors. And in the case of Indian and Chinese, observable factors only serve to partially or fully offset but not explain their disadvantage. Second, even if this was not the case, discrimination could still be one likely explanation for ethnicity gaps in job control through its effects on occupational attainment (for example, having to apply for more jobs), and other factors that statistically can account for job control differentials. In sum, although observed factors clearly have an explanatory role, being a member of a certain ethnic group appears to be the stronger influence on job control, for instance, through differential treatment in terms of job design by managers or through holding certain preferences for level of job control, than differing on other observable characteristics. We discuss these points in more detail below.

Heterogeneity analysis

Turning to breakdowns by whether UK or foreign-born (Panels B and C respectively of Figure 3), it is evident that lower job control is mostly restricted to foreign-born ethnic groups—with the exception of UK-born Black Caribbeans, whose lower average job control is statistically significant and similar in magnitude to the graduate-nongraduate gap in job control in Table 4. It is notable that UK-born Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Black Africans, and Other ethnicities have statistically indistinguishable job control from White British (Panel B), but their foreign-born counterparts have significantly lower job control (Panel C).

Among foreign-born workers, the ethnicity patterns more or less reflect those of all workers. This is not surprising since the majority of BAME and non-British White workers are foreign-born (see Table A1). Of the ten groups considered, only Mixed and Black Caribbean are majority UK-born. What is striking about the figures for foreign-born ethnic groups, though, is the magnitude in differentials. For instance, the differential for foreign-born Black Caribbean workers is twice the differential between graduates and non-graduates (Table 4). Overall, though, the main findings from these descriptive patterns is that BAME groups have lower average job control, but the differentials—which are large differentials—mostly apply to foreign-born BAME workers.

Turning to the decomposition analysis for UK-born and foreign-born considered separately (Panel B and Panel C of Table 5), we again find that differentials can only partially be accounted for by observed factors. As before, it must be noted that in general, the majority of ethnicity-specific differentials remain unaccounted for by other factors for both UK-born and foreign-born. In the Online Appendix Table A2, we also report further heterogeneity analyses by sex and occupational class. Model 7 shows that all BAME men except Chinese and Mixed have significantly lower job control than White British men without any control variables. After controls, Model 8 shows that the ethnicity disparities remain significant for most groups. Although the disparities become smaller for most groups, they become even larger for Indian

and Chinese (statistically significant). Model 9 shows that Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Black Caribbean, and Black African women report significantly lower job control than White British women without controls. Model 10 shows that after controls, ethnicity disparities become smaller and even non-significant for Pakistani and Bangladeshi women. However, disparities for Indian women becomes significant after including control variables. Overall, these patterns suggest that ethnic minority women's disadvantages in job control are smaller compared with ethnic minority men and are more likely to be explained by their socio-demographic characteristics.

Model 11 shows that among those in managerial and professional occupations Pakistanis, Black Caribbeans, and Black Africans report significantly lower job control than White British without controls. After controls, Model 12 shows that the disparities for the three groups are attenuated, whereas disparities for Indians and Chinese become significant. Model 13 shows that among non-managerial and professional occupations, Indians, Black Caribbeans, and Black Africans report significantly lower job control than the White British without controls. After controls, Model 14 shows that the disparities for the three groups are attenuated, whereas the disparities for White other, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis become significant.

Discussion and conclusions

An inclusive workplace is one where the extent to which workers have a say in what they do in their job and how does not depend on ascribed characteristics like ethnicity. Although ethnic inequalities in pay and occupational attainment have been widely-reported, little is known about how different ethnic groups fare in job control, which is a crucial component of intrinsic job quality with significant implications for wellbeing and health. Drawing on two large-scale representative datasets in the UK (1992 to 2022), this study explored how ethnicity is related to the degree of job control in the UK and to what extent ethnicity disparities can be accounted

for by observed differences between ethnic groups. Findings suggest that BAME workers get less say in what tasks they do in their jobs and how they do them relative to White (British) workers using several different measures across two datasets. This holds when exploring detailed ethnicity categories and when other factors are adjusted.

Although the Indian and Chinese minorities are more likely to hold managerial and professional occupations and hold higher levels of qualifications than the White British majority group on average, we find they too have lower job control on an adjusted basis, suggesting that they also suffer significant ethnicity penalties (Li and Heath 2020; Heath and DiStasio 2019a).

The decomposition analysis demonstrated the differentials uncovered are only partially accounted for observed factors. The majority of differentials *cannot* be accounted for by job/workplace and demographic factors, suggesting differential treatment by employers/managers and perhaps differential preferences for job control according to ethnicity. Particularly noteworthy is the crucial role of foreign-born status, as the disparities are much greater for foreign-born. Being first-generation migrants, these individuals often face additional challenges such as lower English language proficiency, limited local social networks, and qualifications obtained abroad that may not be fully recognized or valued in the host country (Li and Heath, 2020; Wang and Morav 2021b). Conversely, the impact of ethnicity on labour market outcomes tends to be weaker for those who were born in the UK and belong to ethnic minority groups. These individuals, usually from second- or third-generation migrant families, tend to have better language proficiency, embrace more assimilated cultural values, and possess qualifications that are more widely recognized and valued compared to their first-generation counterparts (Wang 2019; Heath et al. 2013).

These characteristics can significantly reduce the ethnicity penalties they face and enhance their prospects for labour market integration. The implications of these findings for migrant

inequalities in general are multifaceted. Firstly, they underscore the importance of acknowledging the specific challenges faced by foreign-born migrants, particularly those who are first-generation arrivals. Policies and interventions should address language proficiency, recognition of foreign qualifications, and the establishment of social networks to facilitate their labour market integration. Secondly, the contrasting outcomes for first-generation and later-generation migrants highlight the significance of factors related to acculturation and social integration. Efforts to promote cultural assimilation and create an inclusive environment can potentially help reduce ethnicity penalties for the latter group and improve their employment prospects.

Overall, the results suggest that addressing migrant inequalities in the labour market requires a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between individual characteristics, socio-economic factors, and institutional barriers. Such an approach allows us to account for the observed heterogeneity in job control in our data. We argue that binary conceptualisation offered by standard labour market segmentation models does not adequately explain the complexities observed in the labour market, and hence we have argued that for a multi-segmented labour market approach as being useful to the study of ethnicity-based disparities in job quality.

There are a number of limitations in this study which could be potential directions for future research. First, although this study distinguishes between different detailed ethnic groups and different birthplaces, there could be more within-group heterogeneity in terms of cohorts, levels of integration, and detailed occupations or sectors. For future research, we recommend, first, that researchers explore why is it that BAME workers tend to have lower job control, even within quite narrowly defined categories. The findings of this paper reveal that for all ethnic groups, around half the differential in job control cannot be accounted for by observed factors. Second, this study attempted to investigate the extent to which a range of job/workplace and

demographic characteristics could mediate the ethnic differences in job control, which, although we show that they do play some role, they do not fully account for the findings. While employer discrimination is a possible explanation of the unexplained part in job control ethnicity disparities, it is also possible that differential preferences in job control could account for some of this too (Wang and Morov 2021a). While there is some research that attempts to reveal such patterns, it is still very limited and not always in line with the ‘preferences’ thesis (Brynin et al. 2021; c.f. Moore et al. 2018). Even if the low job control amongst some ethnic minority groups results from self-selection (Frank 2018), it is plausible that this is due to the barriers they might be facing in accessing high control jobs due to discrimination.

Turning to the implications of our findings more broadly, first, while there appears to be greater support for ethnicity pay gap reporting in the UK, perhaps organisations with Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) aims may want to engage in job quality reporting. A vast array of validated and standardised measures on job control now exist (e.g., Felstead et al. 2019b). Or even if such an exercise is not made public, it could be useful for internal auditing purposes, and the EDI—as well as the wellbeing angle—is emphasised. Second, while much of the focus on EDI is at the point of hiring, more could be made on the differential treatment of workers and the jobs they do once hired. For instance, based on our findings, EDI initiatives should pay attention to how jobs are organised differentially according to ethnicity *ex-post*.

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Tables

Table 1. Classifying ethnicity

Two-categories	Ten-categories	Response categories
White (reference)	White British (reference)	White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
	White other	White Irish
		White Gypsy or Irish Traveller
Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME)	Mixed	Any other White background
		White and Black Caribbean
		White and Black African
		White and Asian
	Indian	Indian
	Pakistani	Pakistani
	Bangladeshi	Bangladeshi
	Chinese	Chinese
	Black Caribbean	Black Caribbean
	Black African	Black African
	Other ethnicity	Arab
		Any other Asian background
		Any other Black/African/Caribbean background
		Any other ethnic group

Table 2. Trends in ethnicity disparities in job control (Skills and Employment Survey)

	1992	1997	2001	2006	2012	2017
	Mean job control index					
White	3.446	3.319	3.242	3.249	3.260	3.202
BAME	3.296	3.199	3.147	3.064	3.118	3.084
Differential	-0.150**	-0.120#	-0.095#	-0.185***	-0.142*	-0.118**
	Fraction selecting 'a great deal' across all four items					
White	0.347	0.258	0.215	0.222	0.235	0.196
BAME	0.252	0.168	0.224	0.174	0.216	0.136
Differential	-0.095*	-0.089*	-0.009	-0.047#	-0.019	-0.061**
	Sample size					
White <i>N</i>	3,129	2,357	4,198	5,993	2,675	2,669
BAME <i>N</i>	183	110	272	372	271	392

Notes: Workers aged 20 to 60 in the Skills and Employment Surveys 1992 to 2017. Statistical significance # $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 3. More recent trends in ethnicity disparities in job control (Understanding Society Survey)

	2010-12	2012-14	2014-16	2016-18	2018-2020	2020-22
	Mean job control index					
White	3.210	3.245	3.279	3.255	3.226	3.220
BAME	3.027	3.102	3.151	3.185	3.163	3.151
Differential	-0.183***	-0.142***	-0.128***	-0.070***	-0.064***	-0.067***
	Fraction selecting 'a lot' across all four items					
White	0.297	0.323	0.335	0.324	0.306	0.295
BAME	0.238	0.262	0.266	0.290	0.275	0.2449
Differential	-0.060***	-0.061***	-0.069***	-0.034***	-0.033***	-0.046***
	Sample size					
White <i>N</i>	21,816	18,730	16,411	15,546	13,666	11,628
BAME <i>N</i>	3,547	3,042	2,670	3,576	2,820	2,177

Notes: Workers aged 20 to 64 in the Understanding Society Survey Waves 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12. Statistical significance * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 4. Ethnicity disparities in job control compared to selected other disparities

Group 1	Group 2	Differential
White	BAME	-0.113***
Prime age (35-54)	Younger (20-34)	-0.110***
Men	Women	-0.109***
Graduates	Non-graduates	-0.145***
Large workplaces (500+)	Small workplaces (1-24)	-0.129***
Full-time	Part-time	-0.223***
Self-employed	Employee	-0.544***
Managerial and professional occupation	Routine and manual occupation	-0.419***

Notes: Workers aged 20 to 64 in the Understanding Society Survey Waves 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 (pooled). Statistical significance * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 5. Decomposition of ethnicity disparities in job control by ethnic group

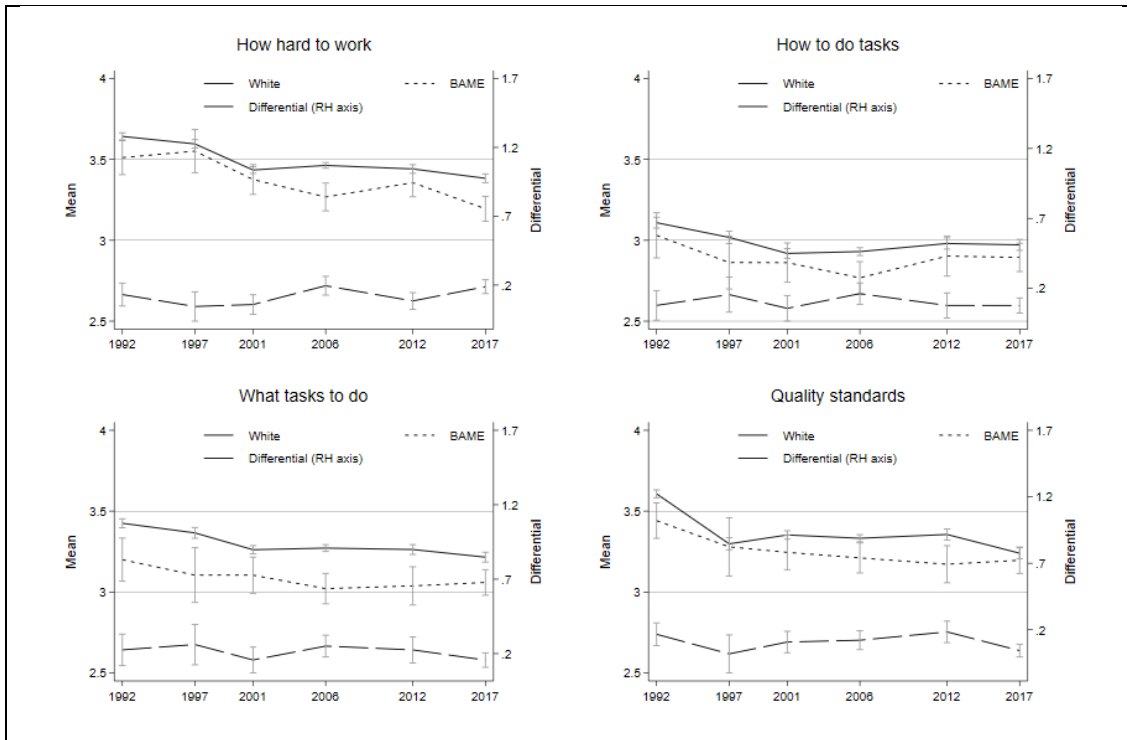
	Unadjusted		Adjusted		Difference	
Panel A. All workers						
White Other	-0.031	(0.023)	-0.043*	(0.020)	0.012	(0.047)
Mixed	0.014	(0.033)	-0.016	(0.030)	0.030	(0.047)
Indian	-0.092***	(0.024)	-0.102***	(0.021)	0.010	(0.047)
Pakistani	-0.118***	(0.033)	-0.125***	(0.030)	0.007	(0.048)
Bangladeshi	-0.122***	(0.035)	-0.099**	(0.035)	-0.023	(0.048)
Chinese	0.004	(0.050)	-0.093*	(0.046)	0.097*	(0.048)
Black Caribbean	-0.185***	(0.039)	-0.110**	(0.036)	-0.075	(0.048)
Black African	-0.224***	(0.031)	-0.156***	(0.031)	-0.068	(0.048)
Other Ethnicity	-0.126***	(0.032)	-0.111***	(0.030)	-0.015	(0.048)
Wave dummies	Yes		Yes			
Controls	No		Yes			
<i>N</i>	67,689		67,689			
<i>R</i> ²	0.006		0.146			
Panel B. UK-born						
White other	-0.047	(0.045)	-0.020	(0.043)	-0.026	(0.091)
Mixed	0.002	(0.041)	-0.015	(0.036)	0.017	(0.090)
Indian	0.048	(0.034)	0.016	(0.032)	0.032	(0.091)
Pakistani	-0.078	(0.047)	-0.050	(0.045)	-0.028	(0.091)
Bangladeshi	-0.035	(0.054)	0.037	(0.056)	-0.071	(0.091)
Chinese	-0.001	(0.133)	-0.043	(0.113)	0.042	(0.091)
Black Caribbean	-0.132**	(0.047)	-0.061	(0.044)	-0.071	(0.091)
Black African	-0.061	(0.085)	-0.023	(0.090)	-0.037	(0.091)
Other Ethnicity	-0.136	(0.076)	-0.132	(0.070)	-0.004	(0.090)
Wave dummies	Yes		Yes			
Controls	No		Yes			
<i>N</i>	58,990		58,990			
<i>R</i> ²	0.002		0.143			
Panel C. Foreign-born						
White other	-0.024	(0.026)	-0.052*	(0.022)	0.027	(0.063)
Mixed	0.045	(0.053)	0.007	(0.046)	0.038	(0.064)
Indian	-0.168***	(0.031)	-0.163***	(0.027)	-0.004	(0.064)
Pakistani	-0.147**	(0.046)	-0.177***	(0.040)	0.030	(0.064)
Bangladeshi	-0.170***	(0.046)	-0.162***	(0.043)	-0.008	(0.064)
Chinese	0.006	(0.052)	-0.107*	(0.050)	0.113*	(0.064)
Black Caribbean	-0.283***	(0.065)	-0.176**	(0.058)	-0.110	(0.064)
Black African	-0.254***	(0.033)	-0.180***	(0.032)	-0.075	(0.064)
Other Ethnicity	-0.123***	(0.034)	-0.105**	(0.032)	-0.018	(0.064)

Wave dummies	Yes	Yes	
Controls	No	Yes	
<i>N</i>	62,710	62,710	
<i>R</i> ²	0.007	0.149	

Notes: Workers aged 20 to 64 in the Understanding Society Survey Waves 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12 (pooled). White British (UK-born and foreign-born) is the reference category. Standard errors clustered on respondent in parentheses. Statistical significance * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

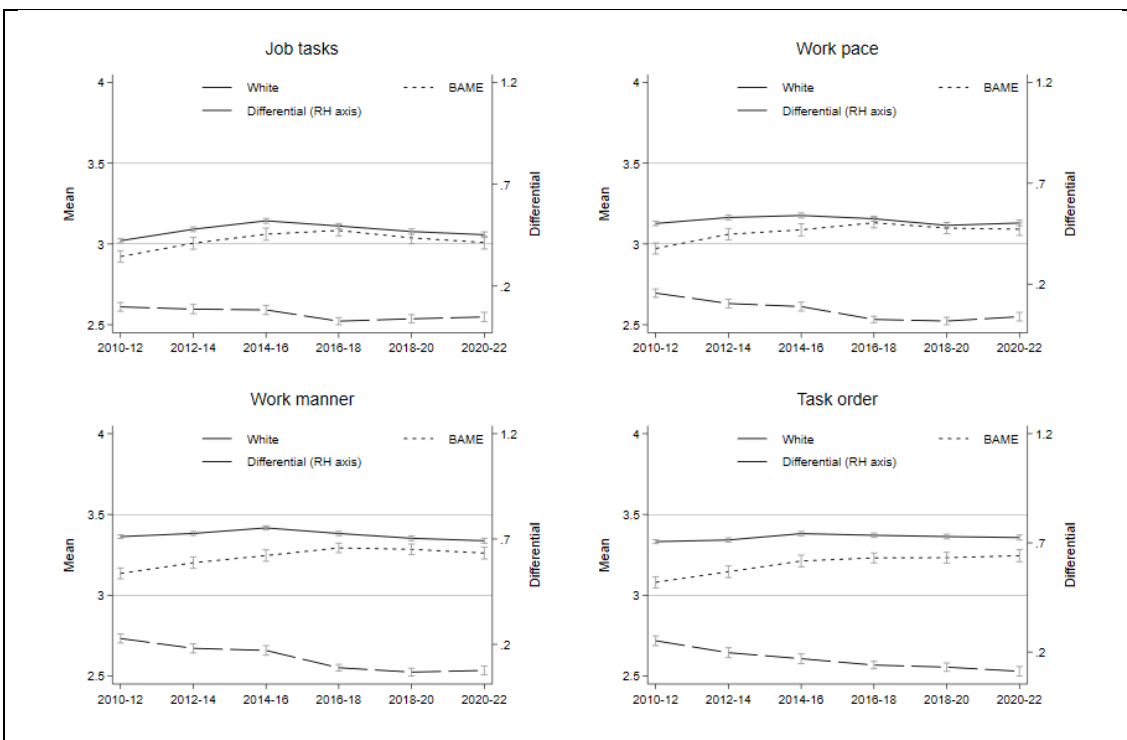
Figures

Figure 1. Historical trends in ethnicity disparities in components of job control



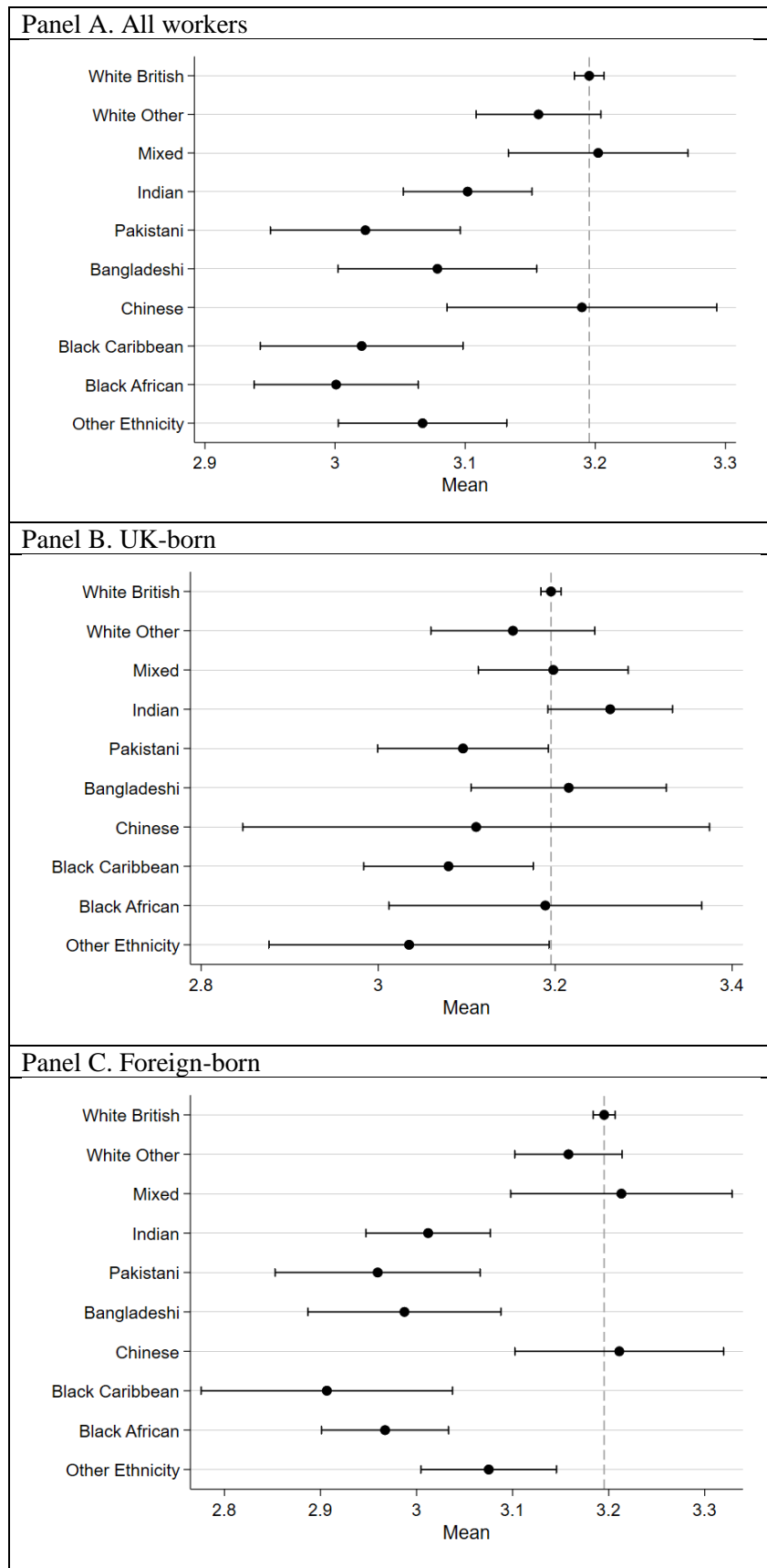
Notes: Workers aged 20 to 60 in the Skills and Employment Surveys 1992 to 2017. Vertical lines are 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 2. More recent trends in ethnicity disparities in components of job control



Notes: Workers aged 20 to 64 in the Understanding Society Survey Waves 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12. Vertical lines are 95% confidence intervals clustered on respondent.

Figure 3. Ethnicity disparities in job control by detailed ethnicity



Notes: Workers aged 20 to 64 in the Understanding Society Survey Waves 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 12.

Horizontal lines are 95% confidence intervals clustered on respondent.